

Why Consumer Confidence Reports?

The 1996 amendments to the Federal Safe Drinking Water Act require public community water systems (those serving more than 25 year-round residents) to provide an annual summary of the quality of the drinking water they supply. These reports must describe the water source, the types of treatment used, what contaminants have been found and at what levels, and the health implications.



This brochure was developed and approved by the Education Subcommittee of the Wisconsin Groundwater Coordinating Council.

The Council brings state agencies and the University of Wisconsin together to address groundwater issues.

For more information contact:

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Regional Offices:

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or visit the DNR web site at:
<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/water/dwg/>

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Safe Drinking Water Hotline
(800) 426-4791
<http://www.epa.gov/safewater>

or your public water supplier

Understanding Your Consumer Confidence Report

The “Report Card” on the Quality of Your Drinking Water



***Where does my community's drinking water come from?
Are there contaminants in my water?
How does my water utility ensure that my water is safe to drink?***

If you're like many public water consumers, you may never have given these questions much thought before. Public water supplies in Wisconsin generally provide consumers with safe drinking water - every time they turn on the tap. But the new drinking water "report cards", or consumer confidence reports, give you specific information on your drinking water- and the opportunity to get involved in evaluating and protecting your public water supply.

To best understand your drinking water "report card", you'll want to understand some drinking water basics first:

Most Wisconsin communities use wells which tap groundwater. Some use water from Lakes Michigan, Superior or Winnebago.

Ninety-five percent of Wisconsin communities take their water from underground water supplies (groundwater) through wells. Lakes supply water to about 1.5 million people in 20 of Wisconsin's largest communities.

Lake water (called "surface water", because it's on top of the land surface) is treated to

remove harmful bacteria, solids such as algae and soil, and unpleasant tastes and odors. Groundwater is filtered through underground soil layers, and so often does not require much treatment.

Your report will describe the source of the drinking water in your community.

Public drinking water supplies are tested and inspected on a regular schedule.

Municipal water supplies are tested monthly for bacteria, once a year for nitrate, and on a less frequent schedule for more than 80 other possible contaminants. These include pesticides, cleaning solvents, and other substances which are harmful to drink.

Certain substances in drinking water are normal, and even beneficial to health.

It might seem surprising at first that so many substances are found in your drinking water. However, because water is a good solvent, it's rarely found in nature as just pure H₂O. For example, calcium is a mineral often picked up by water as it passes through soils and rocks. Calcium and other minerals help give water its characteristic taste, and may benefit health.

Many communities add chlorine to protect the water as it travels through pipes to homes and businesses, and fluoride to prevent tooth decay. Public health officials currently believe

that the benefits of these additives outweigh the health risks.

Limited amounts of contaminants are allowed in public drinking water supplies, as well as in bottled water.

Scientists use toxicity studies performed on laboratory animals along with data from human exposure in the workplace to make recommendations about the acceptable levels of contaminants in drinking water. They look at immediate risks as well as long-term risks such as cancer. Your report will describe the health risks of contaminants which exceed drinking water standards, if any were present.

People who want to lower their risk further can choose to treat the water in their home. Be sure the system you choose is designed to remove the contaminants you're concerned about. Ask the seller for the Wisconsin Department of Commerce approval letter for the device you're buying.

Is bottled water better?

Bottled water, in general, must meet the same federal drinking water standards as public water supplies. So, bottled water could contain more- or less- of the same contaminants as your tap water. Wisconsin bottling plants are inspected by the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection.